

Some facts on violence against women in Canada

HIGHLIGHTS

Fact! Women tend to be more fearful of being victims of a crime in specific situations than are men. In 1999, 64% of women reported feeling somewhat or very worried while waiting for or using public transportation alone after dark, more than double the proportion of 29% for men. About 29% of women reported being somewhat or very worried if they were home alone in the evening (compared with 12% of men) and 18% of women felt somewhat or very unsafe when walking alone in their area after dark (compared with 6% of men).²

Fact! Half of Canadian women (51%) have been victims of at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.³

Fact! Of all victims of crimes against the person in 1998*, females made up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault (85%), criminal harassment (78%), other sexual offences (74%), kidnapping or abduction (62%) and common assault (52%).⁴

Fact! Of all female victims of crimes against the person in 1998*, 51% were victims of common assault, 11% of sexual assault, 9% of robbery, 9% of assault with a weapon causing bodily harm and 6% of criminal harassment.⁴

Fact! Women are much more likely to be victimized by someone they know than by a stranger. In 1998*, 78% of all female victims were victimized by someone they know (35% by a close friend or an acquaintance, 32% by a current or past partner, 11% by a family member) while 22% were victimized by a stranger.⁴

An incomplete picture

Solely on the basis of cases reported to the police, it is difficult to give an accurate picture of the number of Canadian women who suffer from violence each year. In Canada, most crimes against the person committed against women are not reported to the police. When they are, several months or even years may have elapsed from the time of the incident until it is reported.

Also, only 164 police departments in 7 provinces participated in the 1999 *Incident-based Uniform Crime (UCR2) Survey* of the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), representing only 46% of the national volume of reported crimes in Canada for 1999.¹

Accordingly, the statistics presented in this fact sheet show only a fragment of the overall picture of violence against women in Canada. Therefore, these statistics are not nationally representative.

* The 1998 data are based on a sample of 169 police departments in 6 provinces who participated in the 1998 **Revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey**, representing only 46% of the national volume of reported crimes.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Fact! In 1998*, over 28,952 sexual offences were reported in Canada, including 25,493 sexual assaults and 3,459 other types of sexual offence (such as sexual touching, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, incest, sodomy and bestiality). Women made up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault (85%) and other types of sexual offence (75%).⁵

Age of victims

Fact! In 1998*, the majority (56%) of female victims of sexual assault were under age 18 (25% were under age 12 and 31% were from 12 to 17 years old). Adult women aged 18 and over accounted for 44% of the victims.⁵ With regard to other types of sexual offence, 50% of female victims were under age 12, 36% were from 12 to 17 years old, and 14% were adults.⁵

Relation to offender

Fact! In 1998*, 33% of female victims of sexual assault aged 18 and over were assaulted by a friend or a casual acquaintance, 26% by a stranger and 25% by a family member (including a spouse or ex-spouse). As for girls aged 12 and under, sexual assault was committed by a family member in 44% of cases and by a casual acquaintance in 35% of cases.⁵

SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

Fact! According to the *1999 General Social Survey*, only 37% of cases of spousal violence involving female victims were reported to the police in the five years preceding the survey.¹

Types of assault

Fact! Female victims of spousal violence tend to be more severely abused than male victims. More women are likely to be subjected to severe forms of violence such as being beaten, choked and sexually assaulted. For example, of all victims of spousal violence in the five years prior to the *1999 General Social Survey*, female victims aged 15 years and over were almost seven times more likely to be sexually assaulted than male victims (20% versus 3%), five times more likely to report being choked (20% versus 4%), two and a half times more likely to report being beaten (25% versus 10%), and almost twice as likely to report being threatened with a gun or a knife or had one used against them (13% versus 7%). Female victims were also pushed, grabbed or shoved almost twice more than male victims (81% versus 43%).¹

Severity of assault

Fact! Female victims of spousal violence are more likely than their male counterparts to suffer some kind of physical injury as a result of spousal violence. Of all the victims of spousal violence in the five years prior to the *1999 General Social Survey*, female victims aged 15 years and over were three times more likely than male victims to report experiencing a physical injury (40% versus 13%), and five times more likely to require medical attention as a result of the violent incident (15% versus 3%).¹

* The 1998 data are based on a sample of 169 police departments in 6 provinces who participated in the 1998 **Revised Uniform Crime Reporting Survey**, representing only 46% of the national volume of reported crimes.

Fact! In many cases of spousal violence reported in the five years prior to the 1999 *General Social Survey*, the violence or the threat of violence was so severe that almost four female victims in ten (38%) feared for their lives, while the rate for male victims was less than one in ten (8%).¹

Number of incidents

Fact! Women are more likely than men to be victims of repeated incidents of spousal violence. Sixty-five per cent (65%) of all female victims who reported being assaulted by a current or previous partner were victimized on more than one occasion (compared with 54% of male victims) and 26% reported being victimized more than 10 times (compared with 13% of male victims).¹

Admission to shelters

Fact! In April 1998, there were 470 shelters for abused women across Canada, up from 18 in 1978.⁴ Between April 1, 1997 and March 31, 1998, there were 90,792 persons (47,962 women and 42,830 children) admitted to 413 of the shelters for abused women in Canada.⁶

HOMICIDE

Fact! Women made up one third of the victims in the 536 cases of homicide committed in 1999. Data on solved crimes indicate that 51% of female homicide victims were killed by someone with whom they had an intimate relationship (compared with 6% of male victims).⁷

Spousal homicide

Fact! Four out of five victims of spousal homicide are female. In 1999, of the 71 persons who were killed by a current spouse (or an ex-spouse) in Canada, 60 were women (compared to 11 men). Two of the female victims were killed by a same-sex spouse. A further 17 female victims were killed by a current or ex-boyfriend (compared to 3 male victims by a current or ex-girlfriend).⁷

Fact! Young women are most at risk of being killed by their partner. During the 1990s, the rate of spousal homicide where the victim was a woman under age 25 who was married, separated or living in a common-law relationship was 29 per one million couples. The rate of homicide per one million couples was 12 in the case of women aged 25 to 34, 8 in the case of women aged 45 to 54, and 6 in the case of women aged 55 and over.⁸

Fact! From 1978 to 1997, men who killed their partner used a firearm in 40% of cases, a knife in 25% of cases, physical beating in 18% of cases, strangling (including drowning) in 13% of cases, and other methods (such as poisoning, smoke inhalation or burning) in 4% of cases.⁸

Sources:

1. Statistics Canada (2000) *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2000*, Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.
2. Statistics Canada (November 2000) "Criminal victimization - 1999," *The Daily*, November 2, 2000, Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
3. Statistics Canada (1993) "The Violence Against Women Survey," *The Daily*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
4. Statistics Canada (2000) *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
5. Tremblay, S. (July 1999) "Crime Statistics in Canada, 1998," *Juristat* 19(9). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.
6. Trainor, C. (June 1999) "Canada's Shelters for Abused Women," *Juristat* 19(6). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.
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8. Fitzgerald, R. (1999) *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.